

September 2011 eNewsletter: Feature Article

Immigrant Job Seekers: Learning to Overcome Obstacles

There's no doubt that many immigrant job seekers have the right skills for available jobs in the petroleum industry. In 2006, 51% of recent immigrants in Canada had completed a university degree – in comparison, the overall Canadian average was 19% that year. Meanwhile, the oil and gas industry alone needs to [hire up to 130,000 people in the next 10 years](#) due to massive retirements and industry growth. However, it's a well known fact that immigrant job seekers often face difficulties obtaining a position in their field.

Chau Hoang is a career coach who works mainly with immigrant engineers, scientists and information technologists at the [Centre for Skilled and Internationally Trained Professionals](#) (CSITP), Bredin Institute, in Edmonton. She notes from her experience that immigrants often encounter common problems searching for a job in Canada.

For one thing, many immigrants are inexperienced with the Canadian hiring culture. Hoang says that immigrants from Asia, for example, tend to list everything they've ever done on their resume – which may include even their marital status. "They have problems with information overload on resumes," she explains. In their home country, employers may want this type of detail on a resume, but here in Canada, job seekers need to target their resumes. As well, in many countries, getting a job is all about having connections – which can mean entirely bypassing the interview process that is such a familiar step in job searching in Canada. Interviews are a nerve-racking experience for even the cool, calm and collected person. So, immigrants who are not accustomed to talking about their strengths and weaknesses – in addition to doing this in what is often their second or third language – can make the interview process an intimidating experience.

The perceived communication barrier is another major problem for immigrant job seekers. Hoang says, "[Employers] know that if they hire an engineer, yes they are skilled. But will they be able to integrate well and adapt because it's a new country? How are they going to communicate with team members?"

Immigrants also often find they have problems getting their foreign credentials recognized and getting Canadian work experience under their belt, which would make them more attractive to many employers.

Despite these challenges that come with job searching, Hoang says there are ways to address the issues and make the transition from jobless to employed a little less painful. Hoang provides free one-on-one counseling on the licensing process and helps each client create an individual plan to figure out what their next steps should be. The CSITP – just one example of a non-profit organization giving immigrants a helping hand – offers free occupational specific and language classes, study groups, workshops on how to target your resume and prepare for interviews, seminars on workplace culture, and even a mentorship program that pairs professionals working in Canada with immigrant job seekers.

Hoang says she advises immigrant job seekers to be realistic in terms of their job search goals. "Be patient with yourself and realistic about your transferable skills and interests. [Immigrants] come with high expectations that they can come in and work in the field right away. They need to know it's a process," she says. "They get discouraged. Their experience matters...but the licensing process might take a little time."

As for the oil and gas companies doing the hiring, Hoang says, "When I talk to them, they're really willing [to hire immigrants]...Language is a barrier [but] a lot of times, people can get hired for entry level positions." Just because skilled immigrants may start in an entry level position doesn't



mean they will stay there for long. One of Hoang's clients was hired for an entry level position in an oil and gas company. After only a couple of months, she was promoted to an intermediate position because her employer soon realized she had the skills and training required for a more senior position. Taking an entry level position is a foot in the door and can often lead to more opportunities.

As part of her role, Hoang connects with employers to market and promote her clients and encourages companies to continually increase their hiring of internationally skilled immigrants.

"There are so many skills from all around the world," Hoang says. "We have people coming with 25 years of experience and our province could be so rich. If we could just hire these people, I don't know what the outcome for Alberta would be – probably really great."



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